

# Magical Macatawa

The charming destination  
that helped inspire the wonderful  
world of Oz. BY WADE ELDEAN

The small cottage community of Macatawa, Michigan sits between Lake Michigan and Lake Macatawa in southwest Michigan. Lake Macatawa (referred to affectionately as “Lake Mac”) offers sheltered bays for activities such as fishing, sailing, wakeboarding, tubing and swimming. Explore the lake by boat to discover gardens, waterfront homes and large estates nestled among the trees. Macatawa’s charm and natural beauty have made it a vacation destination for more than 100 years. Many city folk vacationed here to ease their minds and souls with the pristine, sandy beaches and sparkling waters. Steam passenger ships and trains once brought groups of vacationers from Chicago, St. Louis and other Midwest cities to enjoy the barefoot elegance and cool breezes.

Follow the yellow brick road and you will find that Macatawa is the magical latitude that helped to inspire L. Frank Baum’s classic











*The Wizard of Oz.* For several years, Baum summered in Macatawa, working on his stories. In a poem titled, "To Macatawa," Baum wrote:

*I beg to ask where else you'll find  
A summer haven that's designed  
So perfectly to charm mankind  
And tone the liver, heart and mind?*

Sidewalks traverse the large dunes, both wooded and sandy, that make up the landscape. Homes and vacation rentals line the meandering single-lane roads. There aren't any hotels in Macatawa, so plan ahead for a cottage rental or stay on your boat—though Holland, a few miles away, does offer hotels.

Holland is located at the east end of Lake Macatawa, with a charming downtown brimming with specialty shops, and plenty of restaurants and services. Home to the world-famous Tulip Time, the week-long event celebrates the town's Dutch heritage, showcasing more than 6 million of the flowers. At the beginning of the Volksparade, the town crier announces, "The streets are dirty, and they must be scrubbed!" Next, an ensuing group of costumed Dutchmen and children clomp through town in their clogs.

The Piper restaurant in Macatawa offers a magnificent view of the water. The eclectic atmosphere, with traditional and modern artwork, makes for a lively ambience. The American menu includes salads, sandwiches and wood-fired pizza. Complement your meal

with a complete bar featuring a wine list and local microbrews. Located at the Eldean marina, the Piper offers complimentary dockage while dining.

After dinner, be sure to take a romantic stroll to see "Big Red," the lighthouse marking the Holland Harbor entrance. Now automated and no longer employing a keeper, the light stands proud on the South Pier. Depending on the season, a tasty catch of perch, bass, whitefish, walleye, salmon and trout may be caught from the pier. Trolling for coho, chinook, lake trout and steelhead just might result in you catching your limit. A small fleet of charterboats operates out of the harbor.

Transient slips are offered at a number of marinas. Upon entering Lake Macatawa from the channel, hail channel 9. To starboard, Eldean Shipyard sits snuggled in a protected cove. The operation began in 1901 as Jesiek Brothers Shipyard, which was active during World War II making 110-foot naval sub chasers and 65-foot Army tugs. Today, Eldean is a full-service, certified Michigan Clean Marina.

The Macatawa Bay Yacht Club, just east, offers privileges to reciprocal members. It hosts sailing schools for children, racers and adults. Other marinas on Macatawa include Yacht Basin Marina, Anchorage Marina, Parkside Marina and Crescent Shores.

The area has a long history of boatbuilding, including Roamer, Slickcraft, Dutch Craft and Chris-Craft. Currently, Powerquest, Grand Craft, S2 Yachts and Tiara still manufacture locally.

*Wade might be a bit biased. He has worked at the family marina for most of his life. By age 18, he was in charge of all deliveries and orientations for new boat owners. He's a partner at Eldean Shipyard, an artist, and an avid boater and fisherman.*